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# Celebrity Endorsement: Developing A Brand Image in Housing Ads

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## Abstract

This article aims to analyze the celebrity endorsement strategy used to communicate brand image messages in housing advertisements. Even though there is a lot of literature about celebrity endorsement, no research has been made up to now about how this method is used in the housing market. Within the scope of the study, first housing advertisements published from 2001 to 2016 have been scanned. Hurriyet newspaper was selected as the source as it is the newspaper with the highest circulation. After all the advertisements published on Hurriyet newspaper have been scanned, advertisement where a celebrity was the spokesperson was determined. This research, which tries to explain celebrity endorsement widely used for marketing of housings with the “meaning transfer model” of McCracken, showed that in transferring cultural meaning of the celebrity to the product or housing, traits of attractiveness or credibility is exploited in general. However, it was seen that other meanings of the celebrity—modern, traditional, etc.—along with his/her credibility and attractiveness are effective in determining the image of the housing project marketed.

**Keywords:** housing adds, brand image, celebrity endorsement, meaning transfer model

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## 1. Introduction

Many products or services launched for sale in today’s market conditions are similar to one another in terms of their functional properties and thus it becomes harder to determine the properties that set a brand apart from the others. Under these circumstances, it is possible to say that when consumers are purchasing a product, they are charmed up by the image of the brand rather than its functional benefits.

The brand image plays a crucial role in creating a brand in terms of the privileged position of the brand in the minds of consumers, the ability to easily distinguish it from the other brands in the market and eventually in terms of influencing the purchasing decision of consumers. In this sense, the process of building a brand image is considered as one of the basic steps of the marketing communication.

In our day, from sponsorships to social responsibility projects various methods are used to deliver the messages that build the brand image in the minds of consumers. However, one of the most common and oldest methods is to deliver the messages building the brand image through advertisements.

Advertisements use striking mottos to communicate messages regarding the image of the brand, intriguing visuals, interesting scenarios or scripts, and they play an active role in making the publicized brand stand out among its peers in the market and turn it into a brand that is on demand. Apart from these, communicating messages regarding the brand image via advertising spokesperson is a very common method. Advertising spokesperson can either be anonymous people or celebrities that consumers can identify themselves with much easily. In literature, communicating advertising messages through celebrities is referred to as celebrity endorsement. Researches made show that a celebrity endorser is more effective in convincing consumers and communicating the symbolic meanings associated with a brand to the target audience [1].

During the recent years, there is a common practice of using this concept in advertisements of housing projects in Istanbul. Celebrity endorsement strategy is being applied in housing project advertisings to build a brand image and attract attention of potential consumer groups. Whether being constructed in or around the city, all these projects are “gated communities” and are being marketed with the “promise of a privileged accommodation.” This “privilege” promised is being described over the lives of celebrities, which seems attractive and unreachable by most people [2].

This exclusive accommodation opportunity is defined in many different ways: a privileged station, prestigious social identity, the chance to live together with elites, etc. Living in gated communities means having a privileged lifestyle rather than just owning a new house.

The gated community concept marketed with the promise of a privileged lifestyle is based on spatial boundaries that separate the inhabitants from the rest of the city. A border is drawn around the housings with walls, gates, doors and similar structures and social reinforcement areas like sport centers, shopping areas, entertainment, and similar services and facilities are constructed within these borders that only the residents can benefit from. This setup gives the residents opportunity to meet most of their daily needs without even getting outside these borders, but at the same time this causes them to shut themselves off from the rest of the society [3]. This shows that gated community concept builds a limited world both in spatial and social terms and creates a “privileged living environment” for a specific segment of society [2].

Privileges offered to specific segments of society by gated communities are highly criticized on the ground that they cause spatial and social segregation within the urban texture [4, 5]. Whereas the producers of gated communities develop their marketing strategies based precisely on these critics and they market these communities with the promise of a “privileged

life." Such that, in the advertisements of these communities, instead of referring to the qualities of these housings, striking slogans are used like "people who have a different perspective," "people who want to make a difference," "life choice of elites," "opportunity to be neighbors of the elite," and "reserve your spot at first class."

It is possible to give more examples to the way these privileges promised by gated communities are defined during the marketing process. However, for the purpose of this study, it would be better to rather emphasize two matters. First, it is observed that these housings, which in fact are not very different from one another in terms of the accommodation opportunities they offer, are assigned different symbolic meanings during the marketing process, which would set them apart from others. In other words, we can say that the purpose is to create brand images that consumers can distinguish. Another important point is that almost one-third of these housing projects deliver their brand image message to potential consumer through celebrities.

Even though there is a lot of literature about celebrity endorsement, no research has been made up to now about how this method is used in the housing market. In this regard, the objective of this article is to examine the celebrity endorsement strategy used to communicate brand image messages in housing advertisements.

McCracken's meaning transfer model is used as the research method as it is one of the most explanatory models regarding "celebrity endorsement." In the meaning transfer model, celebrity endorsement is defined as the process where cultural meanings that a celebrity represents are transferred to first the product/brand and from the product/brand to the consumer. So it is possible to say that this research tries to answer the following questions: First question for which an answer is sought was what properties caused the celebrity to be selected for endorsement. In other words, to begin with, the cultural meanings that celebrity possesses are examined. In the second stage, we tried to examine the meaning transferred from celebrity to the product and the type of connection established between the housing projects and the celebrity. In the third and last stage what was promised to the consumer with the meaning transferred from celebrity to the product and the brand image that will be created in the minds of consumers was questioned.

Section 1 of the article is the introduction section. In Section 2, brand image and the role of advertisement in communicating brand image messages are discussed. In Section 3, celebrity endorsement strategy that is widely used in communicating brand image message and different product endorsement models are examined. In Section 4, information is given about research model and sampling. Sections 5–7 discuss the findings, discuss their evaluation, and conclude the paper, respectively.

## 2. Developing brand images in ads

Emotions and ideas evoked about the brand in the minds of consumers as the result of marketing communication activities is defined as the brand image. In this respect, even though brand image is designed by producers and marketing teams, it is still a subjective phenomenon shaped in the mind of the consumer.

Subjectivity of brand image is also highlighted in definitions provided in literatures. Dobni and Zinkhan [6] define brand image as impressions of a brand in consumer's mind whereas Pickton and Broderick [7] define it as the brand perception created in the minds of the consumer as the result of marketing activities. Similarly, Kavas [8] defined the brand image as the emotion and ideas of a consumer about a brand and the meaning that the consumer recalls when he thinks of that brand.

In this respect, it is possible to say that subjective conditions play an important role in development of the brand image and that brand image may vary from one individual to another. Marketing activities are the efforts made to create a positive brand image in the mind of the consumer. However, this is not easy to accomplish and it requires effectively identifying the target audience and analyzing the expectations of this audience.

Because a brand is not just a name or logo it is in fact the promise, the commitment made. This promise may make sense to the consumer thanks to a well-designed and effective brand image.

Kotler [9] stated that an efficient brand image has three basic functions:

- The brand should have a single message that well defines the promise and properties of the brand in the minds of consumers.
- This message should not be confused with messages of competitors in the market.
- At the same time, this message should evoke emotions of consumers as well as their minds.

It takes time and intense effort to create these messages regarding the brand image. Having a strong brand image brings many advantages with it in the long term. First and foremost, it facilitates communication with consumers and helps the brand become the choice of preference of the consumer. Accordingly, the brand becomes popular in the market and gains competitive advantage. On the other side, a positive brand image gives advantages in terms of satisfaction of the consumer and brand loyalty.

In our day, from sponsorships to social responsibility projects various methods are used to deliver the messages that build the brand image in the minds of consumers. However, one of the most common and oldest methods is to deliver the messages building the brand image through advertisements. Ogilvy, one of the most experienced experts in the advertising sector, expressed that the primary objective of advertisements is to develop the image of the brand [10].

In conclusion, the primary objective of advertising is to create a brand image in the minds of consumers that will motivate them in purchasing the product. According to Williamson [11], in order for advertising to achieve its purpose depends on their capacity to make and communicate a meaning. So the role of advertisements in delivering the messages that constitute the brand image is not just about promoting the inherent qualities of the brand they market. Advertisements feature the symbolic values attributed to the brand in order to create a positive brand image and aim to make sure that the brand means something for the potential consumers.

Ascribing symbolic values to the brand, in other words providing that a brand means something for the consumer is achieved through highlighting the identity and status that consumer will gain by preferring this brand. Because in today's world, individuals or social strata differentiate based on what and how individuals consume. The brands they use turn into indicators that determine their position in social hierarchy. This is one of the most important things described by the brand image in our day.

In this context, it is possible to say that advertisements do not highlight just the need for a specific consumer good; they also highlight the symbolic meaning of that consumer good. And all needs that this symbolic meaning indicates makes a reference to a wide range of desires and values and enables this meaning to be understood not only by its target audience but also by all segments of society. In that case, advertisements are not just about impressive visuals or words; they are also important marketing communication tools where the meaning attributed to the brand is embedded in a cultural coding system with a scenario that the society understands [12].

Based on their skills of creating a meaning, advertisers try to create an image for the brands they market and try to make sure that the brand is distinguished from other brands in the market that caters for similar requirements. In other words, the purpose is to convince the consumer by creating a consistent brand image.

Williamson [11] explains that when communicating the meaning, the product or brand is associated with an object, person or an image that does not potentially exist. One of the most effective methods applied in the process of creating a meaning and communicating this meaning to the society, that is to say the process of building a brand image, is to associate the brand with a "celebrity," in other words to market the brand using the image of the celebrity [13]. In this respect, in order to communicate the advertising messages, advertisements take advantage of the popular culture and characters that are part of this popular culture. Especially in our day when it gets harder to distinguish products and services in terms of the qualities they possess, *"celebrities play an increasingly important role in advertising as a tool for creating and enhancing brand image..."* [14, p. 639]. Celebrities used in advertisements are usually widely known and respected celebrities in cinema, music, sports and business world, and similar fields.

### 3. Celebrity endorsement

Celebrity endorsement is a very old marketing communication strategy whereby popular culture and celebrities that are part of this popular culture are used to create a brand image and to deliver the messages regarding the brand image. Roy [15] explains that this is a centuries old marketing method, which is being widely used today. Such that celebrity endorsement is used to deliver advertisement messages in 30% of the advertisements published in Western countries [16], 60% of the advertisements published in Asian countries [17], and around 25% of the ads published on TVs in the United States [18].



Schlecht [19] mentioned that one of the most common methods used to deliver the advertising messages and to convince the consumers to buy their brands is taking advantage of a spokesperson. Spokesperson can be anonymous; however, the most common method is to use celebrities as spokesperson of brands, and in literature this is referred to as “*celebrity endorsement*.”

Zamudio [20] defines celebrity endorsement as brand alliance between a corporate brand and a human brand, which is the celebrity and expressed that celebrity endorsement is important to enhance value of the corporate brand or its products and turn it into a brand that is preferred by consumers.

The main motivation behind turning to celebrities in advertisements is to transfer public's perceived positive meaning of a celebrity to the product. This way, an advertisement to attain its goal, in other words ensuring that a product has a meaning for the potential consumers, becomes much easier.

Generally, celebrities are recognized as “role models” by a major part of the society and they turn into objects of desire that many people take as an example in regards to their eating and drinking habits and the way they dress. It is becoming more and more important to look and live like celebrities and have the things they have. For this reason, identifying a product with a celebrity to make a product more popular helps the product to become popular in a very short time and turns the celebrity into an essential marketing communication tool.

According to Choi and Rifon [14], consumers prefer specific products and brands in order to shape themselves and their world. Products used in advertisements turn into inspiring figures that may be a role model for the consumer in the process of shaping and building themselves and their world. The reason for this is that celebrities possess different cultural meanings that may contribute to the self-realization process of the consumer. Consumers that buy a product, which has been endorsed by a celebrity, try to take credit for the meaning that such celebrity possesses. To put it differently it can be said that consumers try to create their personal images being inspired by the image of the celebrity in the light of information they obtain through advertisements or other communication tools of the popular culture and they use these products to reflect their new images.

McCracken ([1], p. 310) defined celebrity endorser as “*any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement,*” because when celebrities are used as spokesperson of a brand they convey to the marketing communication process both their roles in the advertisement and the cultural meanings they possess [21]. In this respect, it is possible to say that celebrity endorsement is in fact a meaning transfer process.

According to Ohanian [22], theoretical researches and practice demonstrated that using celebrities in advertisements manages to attract attention and interest of the society. The impact of the person endorsing the brand depends on the meaning such person conveys to the process of endorsement. Celebrities are associated with various and diversified meanings. As McCracken [1] said “*even the celebrity that is stereotyped for his specific quality represents not just a single meaning but instead a series of interdependent meanings... and this makes them a very valuable communication tool.*”

Status, class, gender and age differences, personality, and lifestyle types that celebrities in the current celebrity pool represent offers an extensive range in terms of variety during the phase where marketing communication is established.

Different models have been developed to analyze how the meaning that a celebrity possess is transferred to the product and consumer, in other words to explain in detail the celebrity endorsement which is a very complex process. The following section explains these models that are referred to in literatures.

## 4. Models on celebrity endorsement

Even though people who make researches about celebrity endorsement criticize this by stating the inadequacies of the studies in this respect, celebrity endorsement is explained very extensively in literatures. Especially the definition of celebrity endorsement features four models that have guided the subsequent works—the source credibility model, the source attractiveness model, the product match-up hypothesis and the meaning transfer model [15].

The source credibility model and the source attractiveness model are categorized under the title source models. McCracken [1] explained that these two source models are designed for communication works but later adapted to the endorsement process. Both source models claim that specific qualities of spokesperson as a communication source may positively affect the potential consumers and convince them to buy the product in advertisements.

### 4.1. The source credibility model

This model claims that messages from a credible source are more successful in convincing the target audience. In other words according to this model, advertising messages communicated by an endorser who is highly credible makes a positive impact on purchasing behavior.

Many studies that have been carried out using the source credibility model reveals that celebrity endorsers have more influence on the purchasing behavior of the consumer than the spokespersons that are not celebrities [21, 22]. According to Choi and Rifon [14], popularity of celebrities and recognition of celebrities by consumers are the reasons why celebrity endorsers are perceived as a credible source.

When defining the source credibility model, Erdogan [21] points out two basic features that a credible source should have: The source credibility model argues, “that the effectiveness of a message depends on perceived level of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* in an endorser.”

*Trustworthiness* signifies the qualities of the endorser like honesty and integrity [21]. At this point, the identity of the endorser, the person who delivers the advertising message and how his identity is perceived by the society plays a role. According to Smith [23], consumers respect endorsers who they consider as honest and credible and ignore the endorsers that they see as unreliable.



*Expertise* represents the knowledge, experience, or skills of the endorsers. Knowledge here does not mean the knowledge about the product or brand that the person endorses; it is the perception of expertise that is created in the minds of the target group. Even though the endorser may have nothing to do with the product he is endorsing, his accomplishments in his career, and the quality of communication he builds during the marketing phase may cause the endorser to be perceived as an expert [24].

#### **4.2. The source attractiveness model**

This model claims that messages communicated by an attractive source positively guide the consumer behavior [25]. According to this model, the attractiveness of the endorser plays a crucial role on the effectiveness of the message he delivers. However, attractiveness should not be interpreted only as physical qualities, it also arises from the significant meanings that the consumer finds attractive and useful [1, 21].

Qualities like “familiarity,” “likability,” and/or “similarity” are the features that describe the attractiveness of the product used during the endorsement process. “Familiarity is defined as knowledge of the source through exposure, likability as affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behavior, and similarity as a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message” [1].

#### **4.3. The celebrity-brand congruence model**

In literatures, the congruence model or the model called match-up hypothesis claims that the success of a spokesperson does not come only from that person's physical qualities or fame [26] and that there must be congruence between the endorsed brand and the endorser in order to execute a successful endorsement phase [27]. In other words, it is claimed that if there is a congruency between the image of the celebrity used in the endorsement process and the image of the brand being marketed, this positively affects the consumers [28].

Also Choi and Rifon [14] claim that studies regarding congruence neglect a very important matter while focusing on product/celebrity congruence and one has to pay attention to the congruence of celebrity endorser and consumer in order to carry out a successful endorsement process. In other words, writers explain that if the “right” celebrity endorser is selected, the image of the endorser will play an inspiring role in building the identity of consumers and this will positively influence the purchasing behavior of the consumers.

Source models, congruence or match-up models are being criticized, as they are unable to or inadequate in explaining some matters about the celebrity endorsement. One of the most important criticisms made about source models is that such models perceive celebrities only as a group made of attractive and credible individuals and cannot fully define the world of celebrities that involves complex and various meanings. From this point of view, source models fall short of discovering the meanings that celebrity represents and how these meanings serve to the purpose of endorsement process [1].

Another critique is the ambiguity of the factors that constitute credibility of the source and which factors are more important than the others [21]. Finally, source models cannot explain

why some celebrities are convincing for some brands whereas not for others, and they remain incapable of defining the congruence or incongruence of the celebrity and the brand [15]. One of the main reasons for this is that source models focus only on some qualities of the celebrity and disregard the product/brand [1].

McCracken in article *"Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the Endorsement Process"* explains in detail the inadequacy of source and congruence models and holds forth the new celebrity endorsement model called *"the meaning transfer model"* [1].

#### 4.4. The meaning transfer model

McCracken [1] stated that cultural meanings that a celebrity possesses are what make celebrities useful in the endorsement process widely used in marketing communication. According to him, the success of the endorsement process depends on establishing a connection between the cultural meanings that a celebrity possesses and the product endorsed. In this respect, he defined celebrity endorsement as the process where cultural meanings of a celebrity is first transferred to the product and then from the product to the consumer and this definition describes intellectual infrastructure of *"the meaning transfer model"* he developed to explain his version of celebrity endorsement.

In the celebrity endorsement model of McCracken, meaning transfer is realized at three stages:

*First stage* is the phase where cultural meanings associated with the celebrities are created in the minds of the society. A celebrity's stage performance, acting in movies, accomplishments in sports, and other personality traits he/she unfolds before public determine the cultural meaning of the celebrity. Meanings that a celebrity has do not depend on the persons' personality traits; they are symbolic meanings that arise from their accomplishments in their career.

In this sense, in the endorsement process, the way celebrities are perceived is quite different from the way anonymous people are perceived. As celebrities are well known by the society, the meanings they have are displayed in a very clear and precise way and this enables easier communication with the consumers.

In the *second stage* symbolic meaning of the celebrity is transferred to the products. At this point, it is necessary to be wary about congruence of product and celebrity. Advertising agencies first determine the symbolic properties of the product and then choose the celebrity that best suits to that symbolic value. In other words, advertising is designed to imply the main similarity between the celebrity and the product. Developing the advertisement in a way that will serve best to the congruency of the product and celebrity, and to create a content that supports this idea facilitates transferring to the product the symbolic meaning of the celebrity in the minds of consumers.

*Third stage* is the time when meanings of the celebrity created in time as the result of all performances of the celebrity before public meets with the consumer via the product. The better the images of celebrities on screen are built, the stronger symbolic meanings these images involve and the better the product-celebrity match-up is, the easier it will be for the consumer to embrace the product.

These meanings transferred from the celebrity to the product and from product to the consumer are used by consumers in building their own images. In other words through products they purchase, consumers try to identify themselves with the celebrity endorsement of that product. As a result the celebrity endorser is the representative of the new identity that the consumer can use. In this regard consumer goods are not objects that meet the needs of consumers and serve to specific functions, they are tools used to form the social identities of consumers.

## 5. Methodology

This article aims to analyze the celebrity endorsement strategy used to communicate brand image messages in housing advertisements. Housing advertisements that are used as the research sample are prepared for marketing large-scale housing projects constructed in Istanbul as of 2000. Brand image is very important in marketing of these projects because almost all the projects are launched for sale based on small models and project visuals even before construction works have been started.

Within the scope of the study, first housing advertisements published from 2001 to 2016 have been scanned. Hurriyet newspaper was selected as the source, as it is the newspaper with highest circulation. After all advertisements published on Hurriyet newspaper have been scanned, advertisement where a celebrity was the spokesperson was determined. It was determined that in almost 30% of housing advertisements, messages were communicated through celebrities.

It was determined that 40% of 85 advertisements selected were commercial films and these have been accessed from web pages of the companies that produce houses marketed in these commercial films or from web sites where news on property are published.

McCracken's meaning transfer model is used as the research method as it is one of the most explanatory models regarding "celebrity endorsement" [1]. Meaning transfer model was explained in detail in the previous section; however, it is necessary to add a few comments in this section as well about the way these are used in the analysis process.

According to the meaning transfer model, celebrity endorsement is defined as a three stage process where cultural meanings that a celebrity represents are transferred to first the product/brand and from the product/brand to the consumer. Accordingly analysis is configured as a three-stage process. First question for which an answer is sought was what properties caused the celebrity to be selected for endorsement. In other words, to begin with, the cultural meanings that celebrity possesses are examined. In the second stage, we tried to examine the meaning transferred from celebrity to the product and the type of connection established between the housing projects and the celebrity. In the third and last stage what was promised to the consumer with the meaning transferred from celebrity to the product and the brand image that will be created in the minds of consumers was questioned.

## 6. Results

Celebrity endorsement strategy has been widely used in housing advertisements. In 30% of the advertisements examined within the scope of the research, celebrity endorsement was used and in recent years, a serious increase is observed in the number of advertisements where celebrity endorsement is used.

We can say that in general advertisements that use celebrity endorsement exploit *attractiveness* of the celebrities and their *credibility* based on their trait of trustworthiness and expertise.

Most of the celebrities used in housing advertisements due to their quality of attractiveness are mostly actors-actresses, models, or vocal artists. Some of them are celebrities that are locally recognized and some are worldwide famous. Also celebrities used in advertisements due to their attractiveness are 80% women.

Generally celebrities used in housing advertisements based on their credibility trait like trustworthiness and expertise have very different professions but remarkably, most are known by their careers in football. Probably it is believed that in marketing communications, celebrities of the football arena are more effective and credible compared to other celebrities. This is not very surprising considering the fact that football has an important place in cultural structure of the society and that these people appear somehow on mass media or printed media almost every day. Also it is seen that only a small part of the celebrities used in housing advertisements due to their credibility are experts in the fields that are partly or directly related with the construction sector—like architects, engineers, finance experts, etc.

### 6.1. Attractiveness of celebrity endorsers in housing ads

Spokesperson for the housing project “Metropol-İstanbul” was the worldwide known singer Jennifer Lopez. She has a distinctive image in the minds of consumers by her concerts, videos she shoots or magazine programs that she attended. One of the most important elements of this image is related with, without any doubt, the attractiveness of the singer. Also, it is not that easy to reach that level of attractiveness because not only women but also men aspire the beauty, youth, and dynamism of this worldwide star, Jennifer Lopez.

Jennifer Lopez has personally attended the launching event of “Metropol-İstanbul” housing project and she posed with a key in her hand and announced that she bought a house at this residence (**Figures 1 and 2**). Also in the commercial film, she explains the reasons for her choice as follows: “...When it comes to investment, I just try to be smart about it. I try to pick places, first of all that I love. That I want to come back to.” Without a doubt the fact that Jennifer Lopez bought a house in this residence, makes the potential consumer dream about being her neighbor and this privilege increases the attractiveness of the residence. As Williamson says advertisements associate unreachable things with reachable ones and make consumers believe that they can reach the unreachable [11].

In housing advertisements where attractiveness trait of celebrity endorsement is exploited, not only worldwide popular people are preferred. For example in the project “İstanbul Sarayları”





**Figure 1.** The image of a gated community in İstanbul named Metropol-Istanbul. Source: Varyap Construction Company, Developer of Metropol-Istanbul Project.

(*Palaces of Istanbul*) instead of a worldwide star like Jennifer Lopez, one of the unforgettable actress of Turkish cinema, Nebahat Çehre appeared. Even though Nebahat Çehre appeared in national movies and series that highlight our traditional values, she has the image of a modern woman in the eye of the public. She became famous after the beauty pageant she entered and then she continued her career as an actress. Even though she is in her seventies, she is still a popular figure on screens with her beauty and attractiveness.



**Figure 2.** Launching event of the Metropol-Istanbul Project where the spokesperson was Jennifer Lopez. Source: <http://www.varyap.com/bizden-haberler/bizden-size/detay/j-lo-metropol-istanbulda-15>.



At the time of the advertisement for the housing project “İstanbul Sarayları” (*Palaces of Istanbul*), Nebahat Çehre was appearing in the series named “Muhteşem Yüzyıl” (*Magnificent Century*) broadcasted on a national TV channel and had a quiet high rating. The topic of the series was about the life and success of “Suleyman the Magnificent” that ruled during Rise of the Ottoman Empire. In this series, Nebahat Çehre played the role of the mother of the sultan who was highly influential in the management of the palace and country.

Advertisers promoted housing project called “İstanbul Sarayları” (*Palaces of Istanbul*) using the popularity of the series and introduced the project with “magnificent project” slogan and used the following text in the advertisement: “if you want to live like sultans we invite you to the modern palaces of Istanbul.” Also advertisers wanted to emphasize both the beauty and attractiveness of Nebahat Çehre and the gorgeousness of the project with the “magnificent” word used in the slogan (**Figures 3 and 4**).

## 6.2. Credibility of celebrity endorsers in housing ads

In housing advertisement where the credibility trait of the celebrity endorser is emphasized, it is possible to run across examples where celebrities have expertise in fields that are directly or indirectly related with construction sector like engineers, architects, and investment specialists.



**Figure 3.** The image of a gated community in İstanbul named “İstanbul Sarayları” (palaces of Istanbul). Source: [www.sinpasgyo.com.tr](http://www.sinpasgyo.com.tr).

For example during one of the greatest earthquakes in our country, 1999 Marmara Earthquake, geophysics engineer Professor Ahmet Mete Işıkara was the manager of Kandilli Observatory, the National Earthquake Observation Center. Işıkara appeared on TV frequently following Marmara earthquake and tried to raise awareness of the public. He persistently explained the severity of earthquakes and measures that should be taken, and the way he spoke and his efforts to calm down the society caused him to quickly become a figure that the public likes very much and takes seriously and respects his knowledge and experience. This love and respect lead everyone to call him “grandpa earthquake.”



**Figure 4.** Advertisement visual of “İstanbul Sarayları” (palaces of Istanbul). Source: From April 10, 2011 dated supplement of newspaper “Hürriyet,” pp. 24–25.

To sum up, we can say that Ahmet Mete Işıkara is a celebrity that has credibility, expertise, and the public trusts. In this respect, it was not surprising that he was chosen to appear in the advertisements for the housing project “*Isthanbul Evleri*” (*Houses of Istanbul*). In advertising visuals the fact that the project was executed by consulting to Ahmet Mete Işıkara was highlighted. We can say that the earthquake, which was on the top of the agenda during those days when the project was being promoted, was the determinant in selection of celebrity endorser. Advertisers thought that a housing project led under consultancy of Ahmet Mete Işıkara will cause the consumers to consider this as a durable, earthquake-resistant, and reliable project and that this perception will have positive effect on their purchasing behavior. The phrase “leaving behind permanent works instead of creating temporary solutions” used in the advertising text explains this well.

In housing advertisements where the credibility trait of the source is emphasized, it is possible to run across examples where celebrities are used who, profession-wise, do not have any connection with this sector. Even though celebrities used in advertisements do not have any expertise about the product they endorse, their accomplishments in their professional career causes the society to trust them and supports their credibility. As mentioned above, it is possible to say that most of the celebrities under this category are people famous on account of their accomplishments in football.

Turkey's one of the most famous football player Rıdvan Dilmen appears on TV as sports commentator for many years and is considered to be very successful in this profession as he was when he was a football player. In this respect Dilmen has gained public's trust both as a football player and sports commentator and he is highly credible. From this viewpoint, advertisers chose Rıdvan Dilmen to be the spokesperson of the advertisement for "*Solarkent Evleri*" (*Solarkent Residence*). The slogan was "*I will sign my name under this project*" and a photo of Rıdvan Dilmen signing the papers was used in the visuals (**Figures 5 and 6**). Two points mattered when selecting the slogan. The first was the fact that who the players make an agreement with, which team



they sign a contract with is on the top of agenda in our country most of the time. So it was not a coincidence here that the word “sign” was used. On the other hand, it was thought that it would be easier for an endorser who had been successful in the team he signed contract with or in another business he has done to persuade consumers and that consumer groups would take Ridvan Dilmen’s word and would be interested in a housing project that he prefers.

Another example to that is “*Avrupa Bahçekent*” housing project where the spokesperson was Mustafa Denizli, popular, respected and experienced football coach of one of the biggest team of the country. The football coach appears on the advertisement while scouting a boy playing football on field and he says that “*Stars are not that far, they are right before us waiting to be discovered. And this is what I do. To discover them and envision their future.*” In the later part of the advertisement, the narrator says that “*Avrupark Bahçekent*” residence is a place like this with its infrastructure, social facilities, and location and will be the star of Istanbul in a very near future. So here, advertisers aimed to exploit credibility of a football coach who is very successful in his profession and who built a reputation of discovering talents in a different area of expertise. Advertisers showed that Mustafa Denizli, who discovers young and successful talents, endorses this residence and aimed to positively affect the consumers.

Worldwide known soccer coach José Mourinho also appeared on housing project advertisements. Even though he did not coach a team in Turkey before, a real estate company worked with José Mourinho in its advertisements, as he was a very popular figure in the country. The advertisement slogan was “*First rule of success is to be happy at home*” and we hear Mourinho’s words: “*... If I coach a Turkish team one day, I know where my house will be: Sinpaş GYO.*”

Even though attractiveness and credibility of the celebrity is exploited in housing advertisements, we see that other meanings that the celebrity possesses are important in terms of



**Figure 5.** The image of a gated community in İstanbul named “Solarkent Evleri” —Solarkent Residence. Source: Aydinli Construction Company, Developer of Solarkent Project.

**Bu projeye imzama atarım...**

"Hem 500 TL taksitle ev sahibi oluyorum, hem de evim güneşten elektrik üretiliyor, ödediğim para geri dönüyor. Bu yatırımı hiç kaçırmıyım?"

*Rıdvan*

**Peşinatsız 500 TL taksitle süper yatırım!**

Türkiye'nin geri dönüşümü tek konut projesi Solarkent, şimdi kaçırılmayacak avantajlarla... Solarkent satış ofisine gelin, imza atmadan çıkmayacaksınız.

PEŞİNATSIZ ÖDEME TAKTİĞİ	
İlk 12 ay	500 TL
13. aydan itibaren sabit taksitlerle	60 AY %0 FAİZ
Teslimatta (Ocak 2011)	%30 ara ödeme

**Diğer avantajlı ödeme planlarımızı görmek için satış ofisimize bekliyoruz.**

- Bu plan daire içine göre değişiklik gösterecektir.
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72 m<sup>2</sup>'den 144 m<sup>2</sup>'ye kadar 10 farklı daire seçeneği Solarkent'te...

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Geri dönüşümü tek konut projesi!

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**Figure 6.** Launching event of the Solarkent Project where the spokesperson was Rıdvan Dilmen Source: From January 31, 2010 dated supplement of newspaper "Hürriyet," p. 18.

product-celebrity congruence and effective in creating the brand image. This matches with the theory of McCracken [1] that source models are useful but inadequate in defining the complex world of celebrities that involve various meanings as it sees the celebrities as a group of attractive and credible people. This point will be discussed further in the next section.

## 7. Discussion

This research that tries to explain celebrity endorsement widely used for marketing of housings with the "meaning transfer model" of McCracken showed that in transferring cultural meaning of the celebrity to the product or housing, traits of attractiveness or credibility is



exploited in general. However it was seen that other meanings of the celebrity along with his/her credibility and attractiveness are effective in determining the image of the housing project marketed.

This resembles to other examples from different sectors and does not describe a structure that is exclusive to the housing sector. However based on the results of the research it can be said that specific for the housing sector, there are few different points in transfer of cultural meaning of the celebrity to the product. First, the conclusion that attractiveness trait of celebrities cannot be handled under a single category and that attractiveness trait of each celebrity has different perspectives and this difference is the determinant in emphasizing the modern or conventional features of the housing project. Attractiveness trait of celebrities who appear in advertisements of housing projects developed with a modern design language and/or designed for a modern target audience is much different than the attractiveness of the celebrities that appear on housing projects designed with a conventional design language and/or for a target audience who has a conventional lifestyle.

In the advertisement of the housing project called Metropol-İstanbul, where the emphasis is made on the word modern as can be understood from its title, attractiveness trait of the worldwide famous singer Jenifer Lopez was exploited. Jennifer Lopez gives the impression of both an attractive and modern women in this advertisement.

However in another advertisement that exploited the same trait of attractiveness in transferring meaning from celebrity to product, Nebahat Çehre, one of the unforgettable actresses of Turkish Cinema, is chosen instead of a worldwide singer like Jennifer Lopez. Even though Nebahat Çehre appeared in national movies that highlights our traditional values, she has the image of a modern woman in the eye of the public. In this sense, it is not surprising that she was chosen as the face of the project called “İstanbul Sarayları” (Palaces of Istanbul), which claims to rebuild the conventional texture of Istanbul with a modern concept.

Housing residence called “İstanbul Sarayları” is one of the most interesting examples of regenerating traditional values. The word “palace” used in the name of the residence makes a reference to almost the unreachable, glorious, and deluxe lifestyle that past rulers enjoyed and it implies that this lifestyle is regenerated and modernized. However, the word “palace” used in İstanbul Sarayları project does not appear just as a marketing image. In İstanbul Sarayları residence project, Bosphorus with its historical palaces, waterside mansions, summerhouses, and avenues is reconstructed at the outskirts of the city. In this project, we see that not only some type of structures but also traditional avenues of the city and ports are regenerated with indoor and outdoor facilities [29].

In both advertisements, the transfer of meaning is built on the theme attractiveness; however, there are different categories of attractiveness. In the first advertisement, the attractiveness of a western woman was used whereas in the second one there is an image of a woman who is modern but who respects our traditional values and reflects our culture and all elements of our heritage with grace. Both of these different attractiveness category fits with the image or design language of the brand they represent. In this respect, it is possible to say that images of these brands are configured on the promise of a modern or modernized traditional lifestyle.



This also explains the importance of one element that McCracken emphasized while explaining the meaning transfer model distinct from other celebrity endorsement models. “Meaning of celebrity is shaped within the cultural structure of the society” [1].

The conclusion that attractiveness traits of celebrities are different from one another and that this difference is determinant in emphasizing the modern or conventional qualities of the housing residence arises from the cultural fabric of the society we are part of. As we are located between the “western” and “eastern” world, we have always been stuck between the value judgment of the west and east [29]. This dilemma is implicated directly or indirectly in advertisement of housing projects and expressed such as “modern residence,” “the residence where traditional living spaces are modernized.”

Specific to the housing sector but may be more specific to the cultural structure of the society, the second most important difference is the preference of celebrities popular in the football arena in advertisements that exploit the credibility trait. In advertisements where football celebrity endorsement is preferred, it is emphasized that buying a house from these project shall be a “good investment.” When compared with many other products, property is a long-term investment both in terms of its use and rather high price. So it is not surprising that “investment” value is emphasized in advertisement of housing projects. However the interesting thing is the choice of celebrities in football field to emphasize the “investment value” of a house, except a few examples. These people try to highlight the value of the investment with words like *“I never missed an opportunity investment in my life,” “too bad if you miss it.”* In some examples, it is seen that investment value is expressed with very widely used sentence patterns. *“I will sign my name under it,” “too bad to miss it,”* etc.

Also it is believed that in housing advertisements that takes advantage of the credibility attribute of the celebrity, the quality highlighted in the running text plays an indicative role in selection of the celebrity. For example in the running text of *“İstanbul Evleri”* Project, there are expressions like *“Premium life safety with a sound infrastructure”* and *“supporting formwork used globally in residential constructions”* and these expressions highlight the fact that construction techniques used in this residence is advanced and the residence is earthquake-resistant and this is explained to the consumers by a spokesperson, an earthquake expert that almost the whole society knows very well.

On the other hand in the advertisement for the Solarkent Project, the following expressions are used: *“I can own a house by installments of just TL 500 and my house converts solar energy to electricity energy and I can save as much as I pay. Who would miss that chance?”* and the project is introduced as *“first recycling housing Project of Turkey.”* These expressions used in the advertisement emphasize the technological infrastructure of the residence and relatively superior qualities in technical terms. We can say that in this example, marketing experts chose an expert of football techniques as a spokesperson instead of an expert on the subject, in order to better highlight the technical superiorities of the residence.

In this respect in housing advertisements where credibility trait is exploited, it is possible to say that endorsement by people who the public is interested in is preferred depending on the cultural fabric of the society. It is thought that the opinions of a celebrity who gained the trust and love of the society due to his/her success in his/her own field would be convincing.

Finally, even though housings are not very different from one another in terms of architectural aspect, specific qualities of housings are highlighted in advertisements or specific qualities are attributed to them in order to create a brand image. It is determined that when the architectural setup of the housing, social venues provided, modern or modernized conventional living conditions promised are being highlighted in the advertisement, generally attractiveness of the celebrity is used in endorsement process. However if more technical features like technological infrastructure of the housing—smart home technologies, green buildings, energy-saving buildings, etc.—construction techniques, and investment opportunities are being highlighted in the advertisement, it is determined that credibility attribute of the celebrity is exploited during the endorsement process.

## 8. Conclusion

The main objective of this research is to examine the celebrity endorsement strategy that is widely used in housing advertisements. Based on the result of the research, it is possible to say that this strategy is not used to describe the qualities of the house and in fact that there is not even a single clue in such advertisements about the utilization value of these houses. On the contrary, it is seen that celebrity endorsement in housing projects is used to give a meaning to the product and to promise a new identity to potential consumers through this meaning. This matches up with the theories generated to describe the consumer society.

It is known that today more importance is attached to the “identity value” of consumption goods rather than their “value of use” [30]. Warde [31] defined identity value as the value that enables social communication and that determines whether a consumer will be accepted to a social environment or not. Baudrillard [32] named it as an indicator value and interpreted as a coded difference obtained by the individual within the social hierarchy. In this respect, it is possible that marketing experts try to add identity value to the housing through celebrity endorsement and build their messages defining the image of the brand in a way to emphasize this value.

All projects are launched for sale based on their models and project visuals even before construction phase starts, so the messages that define the image of the brand are designed together with the product. Arvidsson [33] interprets this process as developing the product and consumer identity together and attributing material and symbolic values to the product so that the product is identified with the consumer. Accordingly, it is seen that consumption phase is preplanned and organized in housing projects just like any product that is produced in masses, in other words that production and consumption process are configured at the same time. This explains the market dynamics where the messages about the brand image are created together with the design of the house and that the marketing experts are involved in the housing production process right from the start.

With the impact of changing market dynamics, celebrity endorsement has become one of the most frequently used communication strategy in marketing of housings; however, this strategy that is being widely used in marketing of housings has not been investigated yet at a scientific level. In this respect, this study accomplishes a first, but at the same time it

has specific limitations. First, this study examined the celebrity endorsement issues mostly over the newspaper advertisements, which is one of the traditional marketing communication tools. However today, it is known that, just like it is true for other sectors, digital marketing communication tools (facebook, twitter, instagram and similar social networks, web sites, etc.) are being used in this sector along with traditional marketing communication tools [34]. For this reason, it seems important to include digital marketing communication tools alongside the traditional marketing communication tools in the future researches that will examine the celebrity endorsement. This way it will become possible to examine the issue on a more extensive set of samples and it may even be possible to compare the celebrity endorsement strategies used in traditional marketing communication tools (newspaper, journals, TV, radio, etc.) with the ones used in digital marketing communication tools.

A similar suggestion is mentioned in the study of Bergkvist and Zhou [35], which is one of the most recent studies carried out regarding celebrity endorsement. Writers have examined 10 marketing journal and 5 advertising journal and reviewed the literature in celebrity endorsement fields over 126 articles published after 2013. The most significant finding determined as the result of this literature review was that all publications they reviewed still used the “celebrity endorsement” definition made by McCracken [1] in 1989. Writers claim that this definition is outdated. Because celebrity endorsement strategy today is being used in other social media platforms besides advertisements. Also celebrities no longer endorse just consumption goods but they also endorse business to business products and service, consumer services, noncommercial entities like political parties, etc. In the light of changing conditions, Bergkvist and Zhou [35], p. 644] makes a new definition of celebrity endorsement: “*A celebrity endorsement is an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity.*” It will make sense to discuss in future researches, the celebrity endorsement strategy as part of the changing conditions specifically in the housing market.

Second, this study reviews a qualitative research carried out about celebrity endorsement. Future researches may be built on evaluating the impact of celebrity endorsement strategy used in housing market, on consumers via methods like surveys, etc. Accordingly the contribution of celebrity endorsement to the perception of brand image and its impact on purchasing behavior of consumers may be interpreted in more detail.

And third, it is anticipated that actors like investors, designers, marketing experts, etc., who play a role in housing production process are included within the scope of the research in order to discuss the issue more extensively. Actors that take a part in production and marketing of housings may be interviewed and positive and negative results arising from use of these strategies may be discussed and even compared with other sectors. The issue of popularization in the housing production is very different from other sectors. And the main reason for this is that the housing is a location-dependent product and is redesigned every time according to the quality of the land it is built on. In this context, it is believed that the results are much different than the results obtained in cosmetics industry, automotive industry and similar industries where celebrity endorsement is studied profoundly.

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